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U.S. MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LATIN AMERICA: PAST AND FUTURE

by

Clyde I. Howard, Jr.

U.S. Department of State

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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U.S. Latin America policy has historically been driven by the desire to exclude external powers from the region and to maintain peace and stability. Those motives drove the U.S. intervention in Grenada, though protection of U.S. citizens was also a factor. By the time of the 1989 Panama invasion, blocking outside interference in the Americas was no longer a key consideration; the primary motives were maintaining stability in a strategically important country, protecting American citizens, and promoting human rights and democracy. In 1994, when the U.S. intervened in Haiti, the U.S. objectives were restoring order in a neighboring state from which countless refugees were fleeing, and protecting democracy and human rights in the region. A number of conclusions are drawn from these cases: external interference and cross-border aggression are vanishing threat in the Americas; democracy and human rights have joined order and stability as key objectives of U.S. Latin American policy; threats to the lives of U.S. citizens may trigger military interventions; direct interventions are more likely in Central America and the Caribbean than in South America; the appearance of "failed states" in the region could lead to U.S. military intervention; "transnational threats" could trigger U.S. interventions; the Panama Canal remains a vital interest which the U.S. would defend by force; military action is most likely when it will be quick, cheap and decisive; unless the state in crisis invites outside intervention, the U.S. is not likely to find partners in the region for military action.

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ABSTRACT

U.S. Latin America policy has historically been driven by the desire to exclude external powers from the region and to maintain peace and stability. Those motives drove the U.S. intervention in Grenada, though protection of U.S. citizens was also a factor. By the time of the 1989 Panama invasion, blocking outside interference in the Americas was no longer a key consideration; the primary motives were maintaining stability in a strategically important country, protecting American citizens, and promoting human rights and democracy. In 1994, when the U.S. intervened in Haiti, the U.S. objectives were restoring order in a neighboring state from which countless refugees were fleeing, and protecting democracy and human rights in the region. These cases suggest a number of conclusions about U.S. military intervention in the Western Hemisphere: external interference and cross-border aggression are vanishing threat in the Americas; democracy and human rights have joined order and stability as key objectives of U.S. Latin American policy; threats to the lives of U.S. citizens may trigger military interventions; direct interventions are more likely in Central America and the Caribbean than in South America; the appearance of "failed states" in the region could lead to U.S. military intervention; "transnational threats" could trigger U.S. interventions; the Panama Canal remains a vital interest which the U.S. would defend by force; military action is most likely when it will be quick, cheap and decisive; unless the state in crisis invites outside intervention, the U.S. is not likely to find partners in the region for military action.

The United States has a long history of intervention to protect its interests in Latin America and the Caribbean. Those interventions have taken many forms, from diplomatic pressure through information operations, conditional economic assistance, sanctions of various kinds, and covert action to direct military action. This paper will briefly examine the history of our use of the most dramatic form of intervention – interference with the affairs of another state by force – with particular attention to the three most recent military interventions in the region: Grenada, Panama and Haiti. Its focus will be on the circumstances which led to our decision to intervene, and its objective will be to help military planners recognize those trouble spots where military intervention is most likely by identifying the conditions which have led to interventions in the past.

The Grenada, Panama and Haiti case studies suggest the following conclusions:

1. Interventions to block external interference in the hemisphere or to halt cross-border aggression are not likely to be necessary in the foreseeable future.
2. While maintenance of order and stability remain basic U.S. interests in the hemisphere, protection of democracy and human rights have become equally likely motives for intervention.
3. Threats to the lives and safety of American citizens have been and remain likely to provoke U.S. intervention.
4. Central America and the Caribbean are the likeliest areas for intervention in the region; intervention in South America is much less likely.
5. The appearance of "failed states" in the region could lead to U.S. military intervention.
6. "Transnational threats" – drug trafficking, organized crime, money laundering, illegal immigration, terrorism – could trigger intervention by the United States.

7. Any serious threat to the security of the Panama Canal could still provoke military action by the United States.
8. Military action is most likely to seem a viable option when such action is likely to be quick, cheap and decisive.
9. Although the United States may find partners willing to participate in internationally sanctioned peacekeeping actions in the hemisphere, we are likely to have to go it alone in cases where the government of the target state does not welcome the intervention.

Historical Background

Almost since the founding of the republic, the Western Hemisphere in general, and the Caribbean and Central America in particular, have been viewed by U.S. policy-makers as a region of vital interest to the United States. The nature of that interest was first and most famously articulated by President James Monroe in 1823. Responding to the threat of Russian imperialism in the Pacific Northwest, and to the general threat of European exploitation of the collapse of Spain's empire in the New World, Monroe asserted that "the American continents...are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization," and declared that the United States would consider any attempt on the part of the European powers "to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety."[1] The Monroe Doctrine came to be considered by Americans as one of the basic tenets of American foreign policy, expressing U.S. determination to preserve the Americas as a U.S. sphere of influence, whether against European monarchism in the last century or against fascism and then communism in this one.

United States military adventures in the Americas during the 19th century were not unlike those of the European colonial powers in other parts of the world, i.e., wars of pacification (the Indian wars fought on the frontier throughout most of the century), or more or less naked grabs for territory at the expense of a neighbor (the Mexican War of 1846-8) or of a decadent colonial power (the Spanish-American War of 1898). In 1904, with U.S. economic interests in Latin America (including a canal project in Panama) growing, and with the threat of European intervention in the Americas at a low ebb, Teddy Roosevelt changed the focus of the Monroe Doctrine with his Roosevelt Corollary, which would justify interference by the United States in and control of the internal affairs of Latin American states. Roosevelt declared that the United States would not interfere with Latin American states which maintained order and honored their obligations; however,

> chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, or elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nations, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of international police power.[2]

With the Roosevelt Corollary as an expression of policy and the newly powerful U.S. Navy and Marine Corps as its "big stick", the U.S. would intervene in Latin America some sixty times, by Kai Schoenhals' count, in the ensuing twenty-five years.[3] Most of those interventions would take place in the Caribbean and Central America, where

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[1] "Monroe Doctrine", *Encyclopedia of International Law*, Vol. 7 (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science – NL, 1984) pp. 339-340

[2] Kai P. Schoenhals and Richard A. Melanson, *Revolution and Intervention in Grenada: The New Jewel Movement, the United States, and the Caribbean* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985) p. 88

[3] Ibid., p. 88

governments were weakest and U.S. economic and strategic interests greatest. G. Pope Atkins writes:

> U.S. officials always considered the Circum-Caribbean – which they preferred to call the Caribbean Basin – to be especially important to U.S. security and well-being. Actions there were more assertive and consequential than in South America beyond the Caribbean. During periods of intense interest based on perceived external threats, the United States attempted to dominate the Caribbean, whereas it was usually satisfied with a more restrictive leadership role in the more southerly South American zones. The United States intervened militarily only in Mexico and the Caribbean... Two long-range U.S. goals in Latin America – the exclusion of foreign influence and promotion of regional stability – were objectives of the active military, fiscal and political interventions in the Caribbean. More specifically, interventions were used to secure and later protect the Panama Canal, to maintain law and order and protect the lives and property of citizens, to support North American investments and loans, and, later, to encourage representative democracy.[4]

Between 1904 and 1933, when FDR brought an end to the period of active interventionism with his Good Neighbor Policy, U.S. forces intervened at length in Panama, Nicaragua, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and for shorter periods in Cuba, Honduras, Mexico, and Guatemala.[5] By the late Twenties and early Thirties, however, with opposition to U.S. intervention growing both in Latin America and in the United States, the U.S. government abandoned unilateral intervention in favor of hemispheric collective security as an instrument of Latin American security policy. That system of collective security was developed through a series of conferences culminating in the Rio Treaty of 1947 – the first permanent collective defense treaty entered into by the United States. The Rio Treaty provides for the peaceful settlement of disputes arising among the

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[4] G. Pope Atkins, *Latin America in the International Political System,* 3d ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995) pp. 110, 118

[5] Michael J. Kryzanek, *Latin America: Change and Challenge* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), pp. 178-179

signatory nations and for united defense against aggression on the premise that "an armed attack against an American state shall be an attack against all American states."[6]

The two decades following the inauguration of the Good Neighbor policy saw little or no U.S. intervention in Latin America; the U.S. was focused first on fighting the Axis powers, then on countering communist expansion in Europe and Asia. Communism first appeared as a threat to security in the Americas with the election of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1950 (Arbenz was ousted by a U.S.-supported coup in 1954), and, more alarmingly, with the revolution which brought Fidel Castro to power in Cuba in 1959. The Rio Treaty and the Organization of American States (OAS) which grew out of it were used by the United States to help deal with crises in Cuba in 1962 (the OAS authorized military action by the United States to force the Soviets to withdraw missiles from Cuba) and the Dominican Republic in 1965 (the OAS authorized and member states contributed forces to a U.S.-led intervention to block a left-wing takeover of the government). After the mid-60s, however, the other Rio signatories showed less willingness to cooperate with the United States in containing communism and combating left-wing revolutions. For the next fifteen years, the United States was first preoccupied with the war in Vietnam, then restrained from active foreign intervention by the fresh and painful memories of that conflict. Though Latin America was plagued by anti-democratic, authoritarian governments and Cuban-sponsored insurgencies, Washington had little time or attention to spare for the region until left-wing groups seized power in Nicaragua and Grenada in 1979, and Ronald Reagan took office in 1981 determined to roll back Soviet-bloc advances in the Western Hemisphere and the rest of the world.

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[6] Atkins, op. cit., pp. 214-215

Grenada

The U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983 was the first direct U.S. military intervention in Latin America since the 1965 intervention in the Dominican Republic. The Reagan administration had been concerned about the left-wing, pro-Cuban government of Maurice Bishop – who had deposed the elected but erratic and repressive government of Eric Gairy in 1979 – ever since taking office. The Reagan administration viewed Grenada, which had embarked on a significant arms buildup after the Bishop takeover, as a Cuban/Soviet proxy in the eastern Caribbean which might destabilize other weak governments in the region.

Melanson describes some of the geostrategic interests at stake in the Caribbean: access to the Panama Canal, sea lanes carrying fifty percent of U.S. oil imports, key sources of such metals as aluminum and nickel. (On the other hand, Melanson points out, "although the Panama Canal retains enormous symbolic significance for many people in the United States, a diminishing portion of U.S. trade passes through it, and U.S. aircraft carriers are too large to navigate it."[7]) The Caribbean is also important, Melanson points out, for demographic reasons: "legal immigration from the Caribbean since the 1960s has been three times greater than immigration from all of South America... Caribbean populations have become growing political forces in states like Florida, New York, and New Jersey."[8] Both the Carter and Reagan administrations had concerns about the human rights situation in Grenada: the Bishop regime had "suspended the constitution and the

[7] Schoenhals and Melanson, op. cit., p. 93
[8] Ibid., p. 94

parliament, detained about a hundred political prisoners, shut down the only independent newspaper, suspended the writ of habeas corpus, and refused to schedule elections."[9]

From the first, the Reagan administration tried to put pressure on the Bishop government, limiting diplomatic ties, cutting off aid, and holding military exercises in Puerto Rico suggestive of a practice invasion of Grenada. However, no military action was taken (or, apparently, seriously planned) until Bishop was overthrown and subsequently executed by a hard-line rival, Bernard Coard, in October, 1983. Alarmed by the shooting of Bishop and a number of his colleagues and by the imposition of a round-the-clock curfew, Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz apparently became concerned that they were about to witness another hostage-taking incident like the one in Tehran which had marred the presidency of Jimmy Carter.

In its post-invasion public statements, the Reagan administration provided three reasons for its decision to intervene in Grenada: "the reasonable likelihood that U.S. citizens would be harmed or taken hostage; a governmental vacuum resulting in an atmosphere of terror, anarchy and chaos in Grenada; and an urgent request for U.S. assistance by a group of neighboring democracies who had a reasonable fear of a highly armed Grenada and lacked the security forces to act alone."[10] It has been hotly debated whether the Reagan administration really believed that Americans were in danger or that law and order had collapsed in Grenada, and whether the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) really had legal authority to request a U.S. intervention. However, it seems clear from the record that the underlying cause for the U.S. action was to eradicate a pro-Soviet, pro-Cuban regime from our back yard, while the proximate

[9] Ibid., p. 116

cause was a reasonably well-founded concern for the safety of American citizens in an uncertain and potentially dangerous situation (a motive which Teddy Roosevelt would have understood and applauded, even though his Corollary may have been discarded as U.S. policy).[11] The fact that the invasion was likely to be quick, cheap and decisive undoubtedly made the decision to intervene easier; the news of the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon on the day the decision to invade was made may have been an emotional and/or political factor in the decision as well. Reagan administration spokesmen argued that the Grenada case was unique; the memory of Vietnam was still too fresh in the minds of the American people and Congress to allow the administration to return openly to a policy of active intervention to contain communism in Latin America or anywhere else. However, the warning sent to Cuba and Nicaragua was, no doubt, among the intended consequences of the Grenada operation.

Panama

Unlike Grenada, the Panama invasion was planned for many months before it was carried out. As early as 1987, it seems, the decision had been made in Washington that, one way or another, Manuel Noriega and the system which had sustained him in power in Panama since 1981 would have to go. Harold Molineu describes the circumstances which led to Washington's disenchantment with Noriega:

> At a time when the Reagan administration was boasting about the rising tide of democracy throughout Latin America, the Panamanian situation was an embarrassment. Moreover, domestic political pressures were building for a tougher crackdown on drug trafficking, particularly with revelations that Panama was being used as a transit point for cocaine shipments. The

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[10] Ibid., p. 170

[11] Ibid, pp. 165-177; Hugh O'Shaughnessy, *Grenada: An Eyewitness Account of the U.S. Invasion and the Caribbean History That Provoked It* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1984) pp. 174-228; Ian Vasquez, "Washington's Dubious Crusade for Hemispheric Democracy," *USA Today* (January 1995) p. 56

> Noriega connection could no longer be kept quiet and tidy. It was also reported that Noriega had refused to cooperate any longer in aiding the *contras*; instead, he was establishing close ties with Castro, the Salvadoran rebels, and the Sandinistas – developments guaranteed to raise the anger of the Reagan administration...Agreeing in 1977 to turn the canal over to Panama was difficult enough politically; turning it over to a drug dealer could be politically impossible and the entire treaty process could unravel.[12]

The United States tried a number of measures short of military action to force Noriega out of office. In 1987, aid was suspended, and the Panamanian quota for sugar exports to the U.S. was cut. In 1988, other sanctions were imposed, including the suspension of payments for use of the canal and restrictions on the ability of branches of U.S. banks to do business in the country. In February, 1988, Noriega was indicted by two Florida grand juries on twelve counts of drug trafficking.[13] The Bush administration had high hopes that all these measures would lead to a defeat for Noriega in the May 1989 elections in Panama, in which the U.S. heavily subsidized the opposition campaign. However, when things seemed to be going badly for Noriega, he nullified the elections, then cracked down hard on the opposition when it protested. The OAS condemned Noriega's actions, but took no meaningful action against him. When a coup attempt failed to unseat Noriega in October, 1989, the Bush administration concluded that only military action could lead to the establishment of a democratic, friendly and cooperative government in Panama. An unobtrusive airlift of troops and equipment into Panama was ordered. All that was needed was a provocation sufficient to justify intervention to the American public.

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[12] Harold Molineu, *U.S. Policy Toward Latin America: From Regionalism to Globalism*, 2d ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990) pp. 245-247

[13] Ibid., p. 246

Noriega provided that provocation in December. After weeks of escalating tensions, "on December 15, he declared Panama to be in 'a state of war' with the United States. The next day an off-duty U.S. serviceman was shot and killed by PDF (Panama Defense Forces) soldiers at a roadblock; others were harassed, some were detained and beaten. Later, a U.S. soldier shot a PDF policeman. The picture of chaos was falling into place."[14] On December 17, President Bush gave the order for the invasion, which began three days later; by January 3, Noriega had surrendered and the invasion was over. Again, as in Grenada, administration spokesmen went to considerable lengths to deny that the Panama intervention established a pattern for the United States – perhaps because the international reaction was so overwhelmingly negative, particularly in Latin America. (Domestic reaction, on the other hand, was generally positive.)

In contrast to the Grenada intervention, the long-standing U.S. policy imperative of excluding extra-hemispheric interference played little part in the decision to intervene forcibly in Panama. (Noriega's flirtations with Castro and the Sandinistas helped convince policy-makers that his sins had come to outnumber his virtues, but they were not regarded, apparently, as serious threats to U.S. security.) Four considerations seem to have been uppermost in the minds of President Bush and his advisors: the security of the canal, the safety of Americans in Panama, the promotion of democracy and human rights in the region, and the fight against drug trafficking. Although the strategic importance of the canal might have declined, it was still felt that the United States could not turn the canal over to Noriega and an administrator appointed by him – that it was vital to the United States that the canal be in the hands of a stable government, friendly to the United States.

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[14] Ibid., p. 248

With thousands of Americans living in Panama, many of them members of the U.S. armed forces or other government employees, and with tensions high between the two governments, a threat to the safety of Americans in Panama did exist, and evacuation was not a practical solution. Restoration of a democratic government which would respect the human rights of its citizens (to the extent one could talk meaningfully of "restoring" democracy in a country which hadn't had free elections since 1968) was an important policy goal for a Bush administration eager to isolate Castro and the Sandinistas. And fighting the drug trade had become a major aim of U.S. Latin American policy by 1989; while not a top-level figure in the drug trade, Noriega was a highly visible one, and his ouster was an important symbolic victory in the war against drugs.[15] Although the operation would have to be termed a success, its cost to Panama in terms of lives lost and damage to the economy was high. Panama remains a center for money laundering and drug transshipments, and corruption and mismanagement of the economy are continuing problems, but the Panamanians have held free and fair presidential elections in 1994 and this year, and the transfer of ownership of the canal seems set to take place without a hitch at the end of this year.

Haiti

George Bush led the U.S. and a multinational coalition into the Gulf War in 1990/91 in defense of a "New World Order" reflecting a vision of "an effective, collective, global security system 'administered by international institutions, and resting on the

[15] Thomas Donnelly, Margaret Roth and Caleb Baker, *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama* (New York: Lexington Books, 1991) pp. 393-5

commitment of leading states to the maintenance of peaceful international relations.'"[16] However, Bush's vision did not extend, apparently, beyond maintaining a balance of power and curbing cross-border aggression, and failed to provide an answer to problems such as the internal strife in Somalia, Bosnia, and Haiti. (Some critics have charged that Bush chose to intervene in Somalia only to avoid taking action in the seemingly more dangerous crisis in Bosnia.) When Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was overthrown by a military coup in 1991, the Bush administration condemned the coup and joined the other OAS member states in voting for sanctions intended to force a restoration of democracy; however, it failed to enforce the sanctions vigorously, and it adopted a policy of forcibly repatriating Haitians fleeing to the United States by boat, arguing that they were economic migrants, not political refugees.

Like George Bush, Bill Clinton is a believer in the merits of multilateralism; in his 1992 election campaign, he espoused

> a continued role for the U.S. in the promotion of global stability and security. He emphasized the need to share the costs on a collective basis with the other members of the international community, so that the whole burden of this task did not land upon the U.S. at a time when the electorate would not tolerate such expense...Clinton further stressed his commitment to internationalism by advocating a 'democracy-based foreign policy' and a willingness to remain involved in world affairs to promote such values as democracy, human rights and free market economics.[17]

In order to promote human rights and democracy abroad, he called for a continued U.S. role in Somalia, firmer action in Bosnia, and an end to the forced repatriation of Haitian boat people.

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[16] Wyn Q. Bowen, "The U.S. National Interest and the Future of Military Intervention," in *Military Intervention: From Gunboat Diplomacy to Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. by Andrew M. Dorman & Thomas G. Otte (Aldershot, UK: Dartmouth, 1995) p. 86

Shortly after his election, however, Clinton reversed himself on Haiti, apparently convinced by the reservations of foreign policy experts in the administration and in Congress who had serious doubts as to the wisdom of a policy aimed at restoring Aristide, who was viewed as an unstable demagogue, unfriendly to the United States and with a doubtful human rights record of his own. While continuing to forcibly repatriate Haitian boat people, Clinton focused on trying to broker a deal between Aristide and Haitian junta leader Raoul Cedras; an agreement was reached at Governor's Island in June, 1993, only to collapse in October when Haitian paramilitary "attachés" refused to allow a ship carrying a small contingent of U.S. and Canadian police trainers to dock in Port-au-Prince. The U.S. and the UN heightened the pressure over the next eleven months, with the UN finally passing a resolution in July, 1994, authorizing "member states to form a multinational force under unified command and control and, in this framework, to use all necessary means to facilitate the departure from Haiti of the military leadership...the prompt return of the legitimately elected President and the restoration of the legitimate authorities of the Government of Haiti."[18] On September 16, with a U.S. airborne invasion force en route from Ft. Bragg, the Haitian junta agreed to step down in return for an amnesty; three days later, 20,000 U.S. troops entered Haiti as the spearhead of a multinational force whose mission was to oversee the restoration of the Aristide regime.

A range of foreign policy and domestic political considerations led Clinton to decide to intervene militarily in the Haitian crisis. The presence of a military-ruled dictatorship on its doorstep was a deep embarrassment to an administration dedicated to

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[17] Ibid., p. 91

[18] Alex Dupuy, *Haiti in the New World Order: The Limits of the Democratic Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997) pp. 158-9

the spread of democracy. Whatever doubts may have existed as to Aristide's credentials as a democrat and as a champion of human rights, he clearly enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the majority of the Haitian people, while the junta's repressive tactics, combined with the effects of nearly three years of economic sanctions, were driving Haitian refugees toward U.S. shores in ever-increasing numbers. The lack of a humane, effective solution to the refugee problem was creating rising pressure for action among Clinton's key constituencies, including civil rights, religious and labor leaders, as well as liberal members of Congress (especially the Congressional Black Caucus); many of them saw the policy of admitting Cuban refugees while turning back Haitian refugees as a racist double standard. A hunger strike by African-American lobbyist Randall Robinson served to draw public attention to the Haiti issue. In a September 15 speech, President Clinton explained that the United States was organizing and leading the "international effort to restore democratic government in Haiti...to protect our interests, to stop the brutal atrocities that threaten tens of thousands of Haitians, to secure our borders, and to preserve stability and promote democracy in our hemisphere, and to uphold the reliability of the commitments we make and the commitments others make to us."[19] After three years of unsuccessful diplomatic efforts, it had become clear that only military force could stop the human rights violations, end the flow of refugees, and restore democracy in Haiti.

Policy Implications

What do these three cases, along with the earlier history of U.S. military involvement in Latin America, tell us about where U.S. military interventions might occur in the future? Where should CINCSOUTH's planners be focusing their attention?

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[19] Ibid., p. 159

The extra-hemispheric threats that worried Monroe and his successors down through the Reagan and Bush administrations have disappeared, at least for the foreseeable future; there are no more European colonial powers or expansionist communist states to worry about. (The last direct European military intervention in the Americas was Great Britain's invasion of the Falkland Islands seventeen years ago – an operation which the United States somewhat reluctantly supported as a defensive one.) Classic cross-border aggression is most unlikely in the Western Hemisphere, too. While there are many lingering boundary disputes in Latin America, considerable progress has been made in resolving them in recent years (witness the rapprochement between Chile and Argentina in the Eighties, the resolution of the Ecuador/Peru border dispute in 1995, etc.). The countries of Latin America have become more accustomed to resolving their differences through negotiation; though there have been minor border wars such as that between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969, and between Ecuador and Peru in 1981 and 1995, there has not been a major inter-American war since Bolivia and Paraguay went to war over the Chaco in the 1930s. And the United States has tended to stay on the sidelines of such few wars as there have been; the last inter-American war in which the United States intervened forcibly was a border dispute between Panama and Costa Rica in 1921.

The Grenada, Panama and Haiti cases suggest that order and stability in the hemisphere remain as important today as they were in Teddy Roosevelt's day. On the other hand, democracy and human rights have assumed significance they never had until recent years. With the passing of anti-communism as a guiding principle for U.S. foreign policy, democracy and human rights seem to have become the new foreign policy

centerpieces – at least for the Clinton administration, and perhaps for others in the future as well. The United States is now less inclined to tolerate dictators for the sake of stability, and authoritarian leaders who abuse the human rights of their people may become the objects of U.S. military interventions.

The protection of U.S. citizens abroad continues to be an argument for intervention which the American public is willing to accept – even when there is room for doubt as to whether it is a genuine motive, or simply a convenient justification, as in the Grenada and Panama cases. In any case, danger to the safety of Americans abroad should be a warning flag to CINCs.

For a number of reasons, future U.S. military interventions in Latin America would likeliest occur – like the three cases discussed above – in Central America or the Caribbean. As one observer has put it,

> South America is simply farther away, and we are less directly and immediately affected by events there than by the upheavals in the Caribbean...[B]ecause the bigger nations of South American are, in general, more viable, more institutionalized, and more stable than those of Central American and the Caribbean, we have had to worry about them less. Historically it has been the smaller, less-institutionalized nations of Central America and the Caribbean whose chronic instability has preoccupied the United States – especially if their instability makes them susceptible to adventurism and manipulation by outside powers.[20]

Events in Central America and the Caribbean – internal disorder leading to mass migrations, organized crime activities, interruptions of trade routes, etc. – are more likely to have a direct impact on the United States than similar events in the more distant countries of South America. A political crisis in the neighboring Dominican Republic, for example, would evoke more concern in the United States than one in far-off Paraguay.

The Clinton *National Security Strategy* highlights as threats to U.S. interests "failed states" where government has broken down and where "internal conflict, humanitarian crises or regional instability" prevail.[21] The United States has intervened in recent years in such failed states as Somalia and, in a more limited way, Liberia and Rwanda. Though there are no states in the Americas which have deteriorated to such a degree, if that were to occur, especially in the Caribbean or Central America, the United States might find itself compelled to intervene militarily. The likeliest candidates for such an unhappy fate seem to be Haiti, a country burdened with extreme, widespread poverty and ineffective government institutions, and Cuba, where internal turmoil is among the several conceivable sequels to Fidel Castro's inevitable passing. Indeed, the *NSS* flags Haiti and Cuba as "of special concern," mentioning specifically the possibility of a "mass exodus" in Cuba "that would endanger the lives of migrants and the security of our borders."[22] While apparently much more stable and prosperous than Haiti and Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia are all neighbors with serious social problems and some degree of internal insecurity; all are also of strategic importance to the United States as energy resource suppliers or drug producing/transshipping countries, or both. Difficult as a military intervention in any of those countries might prove to be, circumstances might make such an intervention unavoidable at some time in the future if they cannot sort out their internal problems peacefully.

The *NSS* identifies the principal security concerns in the hemisphere as transnational threats, such as "drug trafficking, organized crime, money laundering, illegal

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[20] "U.S. Policy Toward South America: A Maturing Relationship?" *Current History*, (February 1985), pp. 49-50

[21] The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC, 1998) p. 7

immigration, and terrorism."[23] While these are not issues which can readily be addressed through large-scale military interventions, they might become additional reasons for intervention in eventual failed states, if those states became bases for terrorist or criminal organizations.

The Panama Canal, despite the decline in its strategic and commercial importance noted above, continues to figure as a vital interest in the deliberations of U.S. policy makers – for its symbolic importance in the domestic political arena, if for no other reason. Moreover, the United States is entitled and obligated by treaty to respond to threats to the security and continued safe operation of the canal.

Military intervention is most conceivable when such an intervention is likely to be quick, cheap and decisive. If the action is likely to be lengthy, allowing time for international and/or domestic criticism to build, if the costs of intervention are likely to be high, or if the prospects for real change for the better are dim, then military action is less likely to seem a viable option. This means that small countries are likelier targets for intervention than large ones, and countries with a pre-crisis history of stability and democracy, as Grenada was before 1979, lend themselves more to intervention than countries such as Panama (where the results of the U.S. intervention have been mixed) or Haiti (where the final outcome remains to be seen, but where the process has been long and costly).

The USG has a stated preference for multilateral action in dealing with international security problems; coalition action offers greater legitimacy and shares the costs of intervention better than unilateral action. However, in Latin America, multilateral

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[22] Ibid., p. 51

action is only likely at this time in peace*keeping* missions sanctioned by the UN or the OAS. (Argentina, for example, has participated in UN-sponsored military actions in the Persian Gulf and in Haiti, while Argentina, Brazil and Chile all joined with the United States in monitoring the Peru/Ecuador border settlement.) The Latin American states, jealous of their own autonomy, still prize the principle of nonintervention more highly than stability or democracy; they view intervention in internal matters by other states as a holdover of colonialism and mistrust the motives of the United States when it seeks support for intervention in the region.[24] They are unlikely to join in peace*making* or peace-*enforcement* operations without an invitation from the object of the intervention. "Most [OAS] member states continue to refuse even to contemplate coercive multilateral military sanctions."[25]

I do not pretend that this is an exhaustive list of the conditions under which the United States might intervene militarily in Latin America; after all, cognitive factors, such as a President's anger or frustration, or the influence of events in other parts of the world, or domestic political considerations may lead to a decision to intervene in a situation where there are no obvious vital U.S. interests at stake. Nevertheless, I hope this paper has suggested some guidelines which might help planners prepare for the possibility of direct military intervention in the Western Hemisphere.

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[23] Ibid., p. 48
[24] Laura W. Reed and Carl Kaysen, eds., *Emerging Norms of Justified Intervention* (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Science, 1993) pp. 118, 120
[25] Atkins, op. cit., p. 225

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